

OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) FAQs for the Navy and Marine Corps

- **What is VPP?**

- VPP is the **V**oluntary **P**rotection **P**rogram of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that gives official recognition of the outstanding efforts of employers and employees who have achieved exemplary occupational safety and health. OSHA began the program in 1982 and today has over 1450 workplaces enrolled as VPP Star sites. Each of these workplaces not only has an outstanding performance record, but also improves their record every year. Facilities apply for the VPP recognition after developing and implementing an effective safety and health management system that meets the published criteria for VPP membership, and invite OSHA officials to evaluate their workplace against these criteria. The process of implementing an effective safety management system produces significant reductions in injuries and occupational illnesses. VPP is a formal, third party recognition of this achievement and is based on over 20 years of experience.

- **What are the levels of VPP recognition?**

- **Star** - exemplary workplaces with comprehensive and effective safety and health management systems and mishap rates that are below their industry peers' average. Star sites commit to continual improvement and are reevaluated every three to five years.
- **Merit** - workplaces with good safety and health management systems that are improving towards Star status. Merit status is limited to not longer than three years.
- **Star Demonstration** - Recognition for worksites that address unique safety and health issues.

- **Why should a Navy activity consider competing for the OSHA VPP Star or Merit status?**

- **REDUCE INJURIES** and **SAVE MONEY**: Average mishap reduction of greater than 50%
- Help shape the Navy's safety culture
- Excellent opportunity to engage management and workers to improve work processes
- Excellent opportunity for senior leaders to be recognized

- Help move the Navy to a world class safety organization
- **How long does it take to earn the VPP Star?**
 - Aside from the program requirements to have certain elements in place and documented for a period of at least 12 months, there is no timeline. Rather, the time is performance-based. The activity must achieve and maintain exemplary safety and occupational health performance, as described in the VPP requirements posted on www.osha.gov. The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard earned VPP Star status in 18 months, but they started with a high baseline of achievement. To draw an analogy with the Olympics, the journey is more important than the award and upon reaching the Star destination, there is a requirement for continual improvement in order to remain in the program. As the workplace works towards VPP, the achievements and momentum they generate drive the process forward.
- **What are the benefits of earning the VPP Star Site Designation?**
 - The most obvious benefit is the national recognition of superior safety performance. The VPP flag ceremony attracts VIP attendees and press coverage and bestows the right to use the VPP Star flag and logo. However, the VPP flag is just the public recognition of a highly integrated internal system that effectively anticipates, detects, corrects, verifies, and tracks safety performance. The process of developing this system begins to yield safety performance benefits almost immediately and as it matures, the safety performance improves, with measurable and consistent reductions in mishap incidents and in the severity of mishaps that do occur. OSHA reports that Star sites have lost day rates that are 52 percent lower than their industry peers. The main benefit of VPP is that it provides a tested system that has more than twenty years of history in reducing workplace injuries and illnesses.
- **What is the DoD VPP Center of Excellence (CX)?**
 - The CX is jointly funded by the military services to assist selected installations in attaining OSHA VPP “Star” Status and to develop and pilot the DoD VPP Center of Excellence (CX) to provide expertise, tools, and communications on best practices and VPP. See <http://vppcx.org/>.
- **How were the CX Naval activities selected?**
 - The starting point was the “Top 40 Installations” identified by the DoD Defense Manpower Data Center, based on lost day rates. These installations have the worst safety records and to meet the mishap reduction goals of the Secretary of Defense, they were initially identified as having the greatest need to improve. The Shore Safety Committee VPP Working Group reviewed this list and made

recommendations for Navy and Marine Corps installations, based on knowledge of operations and a desire to balance the distribution of installations throughout the headquarters commands. This recommended list was submitted to the headquarter commands for concurrence and a revised final list was submitted to the DoD VPP Center of Excellence.

- **How much does it cost to achieve VPP?**

- There are no charges to submit an application to OSHA for VPP recognition or for the OSHA evaluation, including the onsite visit and outreach assistance. Free assistance is available from mentors, who are VPP Star sites who provide outreach to locations that have declared an interest in pursuing VPP status. That said, the costs to build a VPP-eligible installation depend on the corrective actions needed to improve the workplace's safety performance up to VPP criteria and on the materials and resources needed to communicate the VPP initiative to the work force. This can be an entirely in-house effort, if the site already has an effective safety management system, or may entail purchase of materials and services.
- Some of the dollar costs are compliance costs that would be incurred regardless of VPP interest. For example, one of the Navy shipyards spent over a million dollars for machine guarding to bring their equipment up to regulatory standards. This was a cost that would have been paid regardless of VPP intent, but was identified during the hazard survey that is required for VPP status.
- Frequently, sites that pursue VPP status rely on contractor services to perform gap analyses, recommend management systems, provide training, analyze trends, perform surveys, and write application drafts. Often these services streamline and focus the efforts and help the installation avoid pitfalls that can delay VPP Star recognition. The need for contracted services depends on the abilities and time available in-house.
- Informing and building employee support for the VPP effort requires some purchases, such as banners and insignia items (e.g., shirts, jackets, mugs, badge holders), or other tangible reminders of VPP. Incentives and meals for individual or committee participation in safety initiatives are often provided. This is not unique to VPP efforts, but is sometimes a new expense. Hosting the VPP ceremony generally involves providing refreshments for all hands attending the event.

- **What is the first step if we are interested in pursuing VPP recognition?**

- The first step is to learn as much about VPP as possible. A good starting point is the OSHA website at www.osha.gov, where there are menu links to VPP information. The nonprofit membership organization, the Voluntary Protection Program Participants Association (VPPPA), offers both information and educational opportunities, www.vpppa.org. This organization encourages

networking and mentoring. The DoD VPP Center of Excellence has a website at <http://vppcx.org/>.

- Explore the level of interest in VPP at your workplace and educate leaders, including union and employee leaders, about VPP. You may invite your OSHA regional office to give a presentation.
 - Evaluate the steps needed to achieve VPP status at your facility and develop a plan to move forward. A formal initial step is a comprehensive gap analysis to compare the status of your Activity with the VPP criteria.
 - Initiate discussions with the regional OSHA office about your intent to pursue VPP recognition.
- **Does the Navy/Marine Corps offer any sources of help to Naval activities that want to pursue VPP?**
 - The Navy and Marine Corps nominated installations for assistance to the DoD VPP Center of Excellence (CX). These Naval activities are receiving technical assistance from the CX contractor. A limited number of additional Naval activities may be nominated by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Safety), (DASN(S)), based on an activity's commitment to pursuing VPP that is endorsed up the chain of command. The Navy and Marine Corps have provided funding for this initiative. Information about the CX program and VPP is posted at <http://vppcx.org/>.
 - The success of three Navy shipyards in earning VPP Star status speaks to the absence of institutional barriers to this achievement. Each achieved this milestone with organizational support from NAVSEA, but minimal financial and technical support. In addition, two Navy Southeast Region Activities have submitted VPP applications to OSHA and three are enrolled in the OSHA VPP Challenge program to move toward VPP status in a phased approach.
 - Under the Defense Employee Work Safety Demonstration Program (DEWSDP), CNI is providing contractor support for Navy Region Southeast installations to improve their safety management systems by adopting industry best practices.
 - The Shore Safety Committee VPP Work Group is a technical resource within the Navy/Marine Corps. The WG is committed to removing barriers to VPP achievement and promoting VPP as an effective strategy for mishap reduction. View the [charter](#) and [membership roster](#). The WG developed the [Navy VPP Sustainment Flow Chart](#) and the [Navy VPP Application Process Flow Chart](#) as well as these FAQs.

- **What is special/unique about VPP?**

- Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of VPP sites is the employee ownership of the safety program. They are active partners with management and the safety office in continually improving safety performance. Their workplace knowledge and enthusiasm is actively engaged in numerous activities to analyze hazards, develop solutions, and track progress.
- Another characteristic is the commitment to look for hazards and to correct them in a timely fashion. There is tremendous pride in the innovations made for safety.
- VPP sites have formal tracking and trending systems to measure safety performance, with an emphasis on leading indicators, such as timeliness of mishap reporting and investigations, numbers of inspections performed, trends in inspection findings, closure rates for corrective actions, status of preventative maintenance, trends in hazard reporting, evacuation and response times in emergency drills, adherence to safety training plans, etc. The results of these analyses are shared with the workforce.
- VPP Star sites have mishap rates that are below their industry peers. Some Star sites have reduced their mishap rates by 80 percent or more.

- **Is the Navy/Marine Corps gearing up to require VPP recognition sometime down the road?**

- No. The first word in VPP is Voluntary. Activities that embark on a VPP plan of action will be recognized for the commitment and hard work this entails. No matter how long it takes, activities that are working on VPP recognition will be acknowledged as Navy/Marine Corps safety leaders. Activities that are not reducing their mishap rates will be encouraged to consider VPP as a proven way to reduce their injuries and illnesses.

- **How does VPP apply to military personnel and military unique sites?**

- OSHA does not have jurisdiction over military personnel or uniquely military workplaces. The Navy and Marine Corps are committed to full inclusion of military personnel in all VPP initiatives. At this point, it is premature to develop a military-specific VPP recognition program. The Navy/Marine Corps will build on the successes of VPP to evolve a strategy to build and recognize exemplary military safety systems.